

ITEM 14

NOTICE OF MOTION - COUNCILLOR CATH BLAKEY - SOFT PLASTICS COLLECTION SCHEME

Councillor Cath Blakey has submitted the following Notice of Motion –

“I formally move that Council –

- 1 Note the 9 November 2022 suspension of the REDcycle soft plastics collection scheme which demonstrates that systemic changes are needed in the Australian packaging industry to stem waste.
- 2 Note that the REDcycle collection scheme reduced the volume of waste sent to Whytes Gully landfill, and that this volume is expected to increase following the suspension of the REDcycle program.
- 3 Write to state Minister for Environment and Heritage the Hon James Griffin MP and federal Minister for the Environment and Water the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, calling for the APCO (Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation) targets be mandated into law.”

Background provided by Councillor Cath Blakey:

On 9 November 2022, Melbourne-based company REDcycle announced a temporarily pause to its soft plastics collection program at 2,000 supermarkets across Australia. REDcycle revealed that it had been forced to stockpile their collections from more than 2,000 supermarkets since July 2022 instead of sending to reprocessing partners for recycling.

While the REDcycle collection is suspended, consumers will have to no choice but to put all soft plastic into the regular waste bin, destined for landfill.

Up until recently REDcycle collected 5 million soft plastic items a day or 7,000 tonnes a year – this included shopping bags, chip packets, pet-food bags, ice-cream wrappers, bubble wrap, frozen food packaging and cling film since 2011. Even at its peak, REDcycle was only collecting an estimated 1-2 per cent of soft plastics – the rest ends up in landfill or as litter. Soft plastic is one of the most difficult packaging formats to recycle, reflected in its low recycling rate.

The REDcycle supply chain was almost entirely dependent on a single recycling operator to process its stock. Unfortunately, a fire at the Close the Loop recycling plant in outer Melbourne in June 2022 suspended operations and the plant requires reconstruction. The Close the Loop plant converts the soft plastics into an additive and binding agent for asphalt – the only mass-use end product REDcycle had found anywhere in the country.

It is reported that in February 2021, REDcycle had already lost a processing deal with Plastic Forests, a small-scale recycling partner that makes a range of products including garden planting kits. In November 2022, outdoor furniture and decking-maker Replas stopped accepting even small shipments of plastics because it had an oversupply and was planning to phase out processing the material.

In 2018 the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) coordinated the establishment of Australia's 2025 National Packaging Targets. APCO is the agency charged by government to work with industry towards a circular materials economy. First established in 2018, the 2025 Targets are:

- 100% reusable, recyclable or compostable packaging.
- 70% of plastic packaging being recycled or composted.
- 50% of average recycled content included in packaging (revised from 30% in 2020).
- The phase out of problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics packaging.

The 2025 Targets are supported by the Federal and all Australian State and Territory Governments and were included in the 2019 National Waste Policy Action Plan and the 2021 National Plastics Plan. Several states and territories have passed or are developing legislation that will ban some of the problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic packaging items identified by APCO for phase-out.

Each year APCO collects benchmark data to assess Australia's progress towards the 2025 Targets, presented in annual Consumption & Recycling Data reports.



[^]Data shown excludes wood packaging due to insufficient data

Table: Progress towards the 2025 Targets as of 2019-20.

Source: <https://apco.org.au/national-packaging-targets>